Nathan Harrison:
in the words of those who spent some time with him

Peter Brueggeman 2026

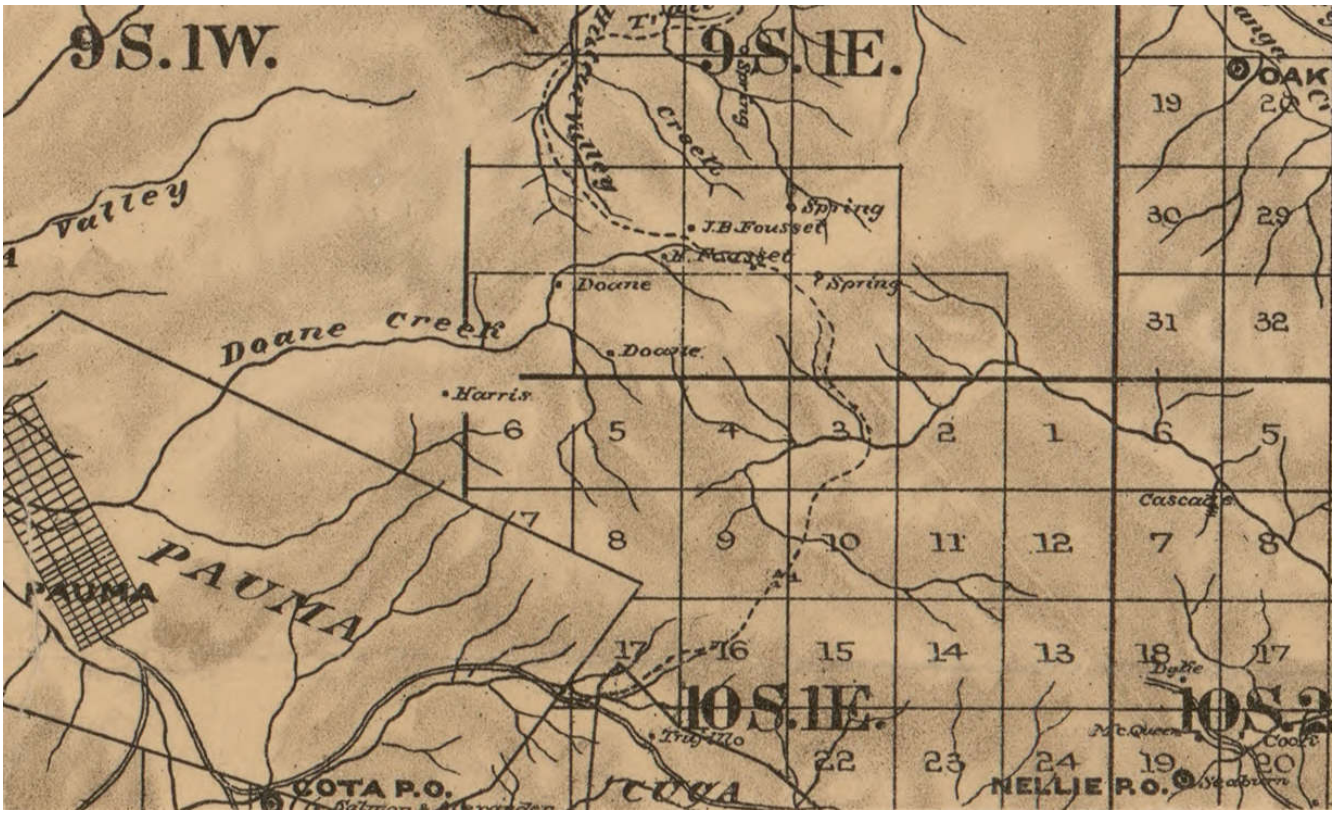
Nathan Harrison and his dog, undated
Robert Asher photo

From the late 1880s to 1919, Nathan Harrison lived on the west side of Palomar Mountain, on the west road up the mountain now named after him, Nate Harrison Grade [1]. Along with several others, Nathan Harrison is iconic among the early Palomar Mountain settlers.

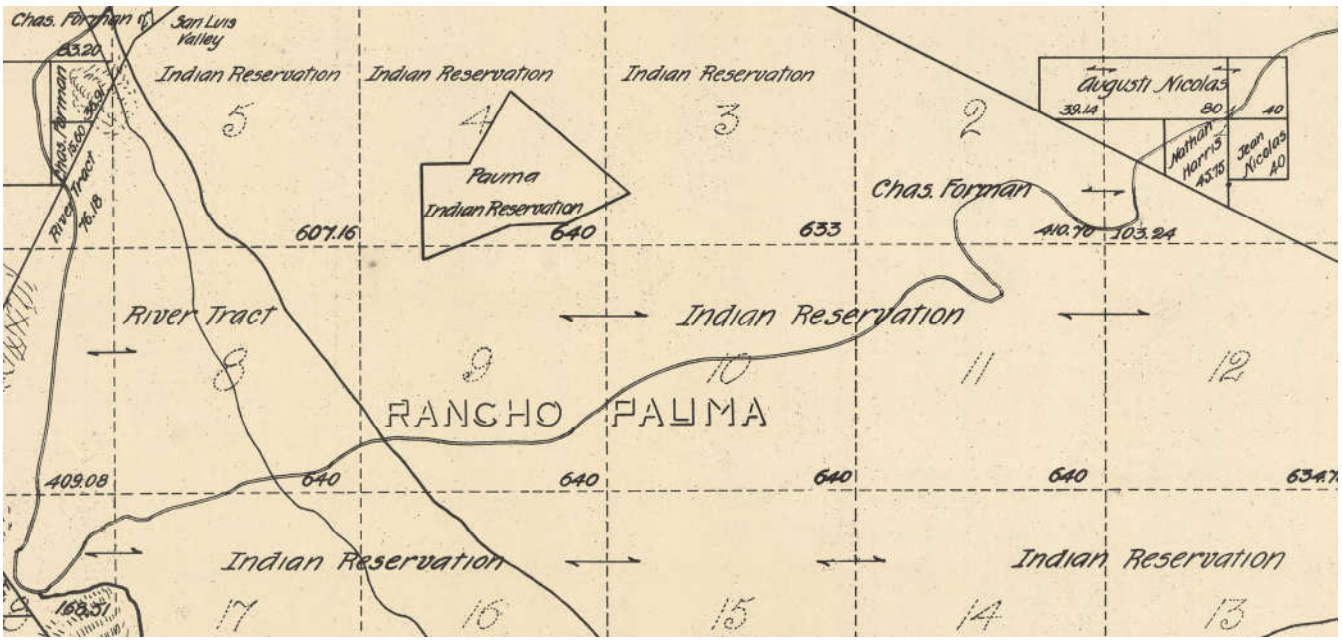
In the late 1880s, when Nathan Harrison moved onto Palomar Mountain, travel to Palomar Mountain was difficult. There was a very steep road up the east side of Palomar Mountain and there were Indian trails on the south and west sides [3].

Nathan Harrison moved onto a Pauma Indian summer camp site called To-ko-ma where there was a spring, at a location well up their trail up the west side of Palomar Mountain [Philip Stedman Sparkman called the site Tokamai] [7].

Labelled as “Harris” in left center, Nathan Harrison’s home site first appears on a map published in 1890. [9]. The Indian trail up the south side of Palomar Mountain, called the Trujillo Trail is shown. Nate Harrison lived “off the beaten path” so most visitors and summer campers would not have seen him at this time.



Travel to Palomar Mountain was greatly improved with the opening of the Nate Harrison Grade up the west side of Palomar Mountain, which began construction in March 1897, and finished in June 1900 [2]. Running alongside Nathan Harrison’s property with its spring, the opening of this road in 1900 greatly accelerated the number of people who visited Palomar Mountain and thus who met Nathan Harrison, who lived along this road.



The 1912 Plat book of San Diego County, California shows the road and Nathan Harrison’s residence alongside his neighbors, the Nicolas brothers; Nathan Harrison lived high up on the now twelve-year-old road [10].

Nathan Harrison became an attraction and celebrity for Palomar Mountain visitors, appearing in many photos.

Nathan Harrison, 1918 Peter Brueggeman photo

The outline of his life is well sorted out in several publications including Seth Mallios' book **Born a Slave, Died a Pioneer: Nathan Harrison and the Historical Archaeology of Legend** [1]. The focus of this work is substantial remembrances of and conversations with him. Excluded are brief mentions of him, or interviews that mostly tell Harrison's history.

Max Peters

Frances Bevan Ryan interviewed Maximiliano "Max" Peters (1887-1980), living at the Pauma Indian Reservation, on December 18, 1964, and made these notes [6]:

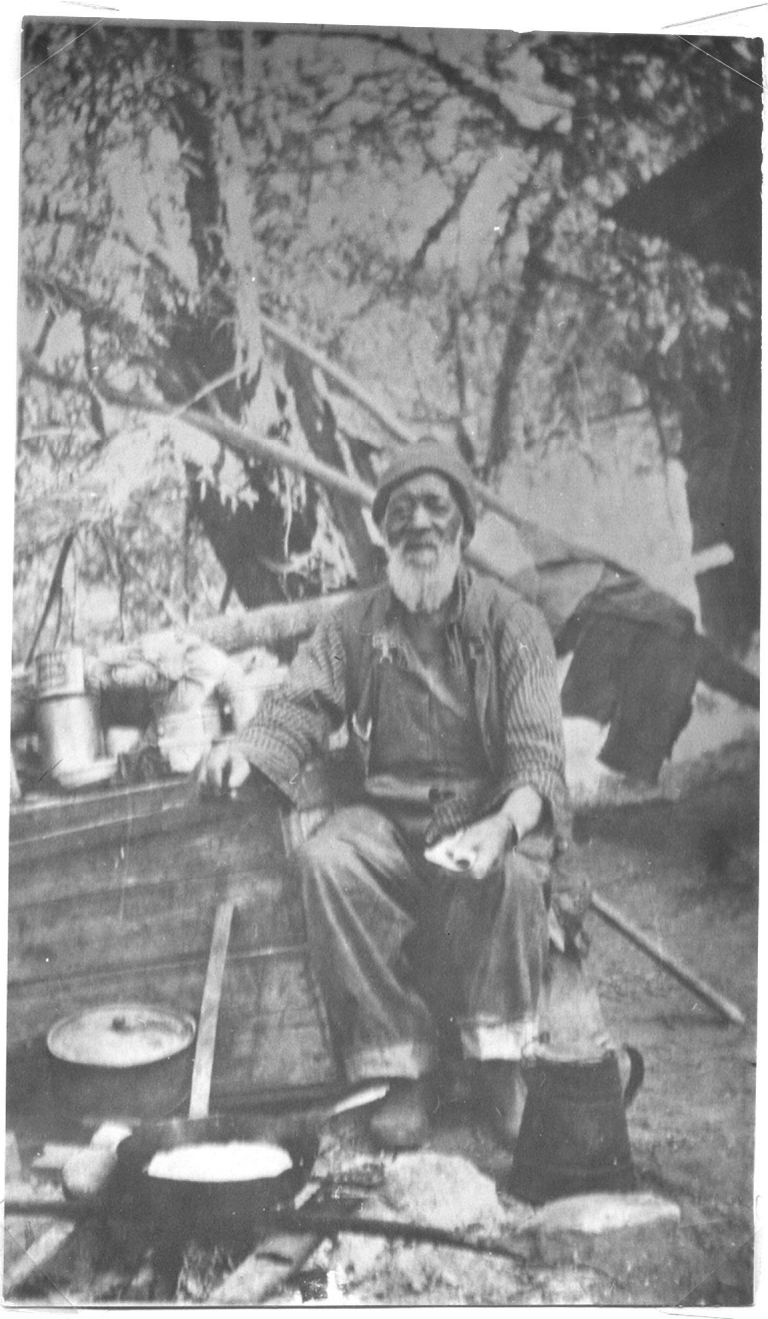
> Max M. Peters born in Pauma adobe house 77 years ago. Knew Nate at 10-12 years of age 'til his death. Max's grandmother – Incarnationa (Spanish name) was good friend of Nates. Nate called her God Mother. Max was delivery boy for his grandmother to take food she cooked up to Nate each week end after school was out Fridays. She made him biscuits, bread, beans, tamali, green corn. Max called him Uncle Nate – and spent almost every week end up on the mountain with Nate. Nate understood Indian language. … Nate was married to an Indian woman for awhile and lived in Rincon. Max didn't know what happened to the wife. Then Nate moved up to Baileys. He had a dozen or more pits at Baileys. Rode his old white horse he owned. When Max's grandmother died… Nate rode his old white horse down to the funeral. Nate was old and feeble himself, but he came.
>
> Indians called Nate Inez. He killed mountain lion to eat. One Juan went to visit Nate once – Como esta Juan? Nate greeted. Eat some meat. Juan ate his fill, and left – returned 4 or

5 days later. Nate asked him How was the lion meat? Juan was mad but it was too late the meat was digested.

Nate used to talk until midnight. The most memorable story he told several times was about his early life. He was born a slave and had to pull the plow, harrow, corn planter. Along with other negroes Nate was to be sold as a slave because he was full grown. One man came to look the slaves over but found Nate too small – though he was short he was husky. Nate got to thinking he didn't want to be sold – He practiced swimming the river which was ¼ mile wide. He'd swim it three times until he was too tired and had to give up. All the while he grew stronger and a good swimmer. A man (slave buyer) came and said he was short handed for horses. Nate was sure he'd be sold the next day. That night he got together all his belongings – shoes, pants, shirt, some matches and tied them in a bundle on his head. He jumped in the river and floated with the current 50-60 miles downstream. The bank was high – he grabbed hold a tree limb and climbed up the steep bank. It was dark – a jungle and Nate had no idea where he was. Afraid he'd be caught by a wild animal (bear) or the white man and taken back to his master to be sold. Made a little fire to warm himself. Slept a little supported in the crotch of a tree. Fire would always drive away wild things – especially wolves. As the fire died down he'd add a little more wood and crawl back up the tree to rest. Didn't know which way to go – went North. Saw wolf and bear tracks – no humans. Spent two nights thusly – the next day he heard people talking. Found Indians – They grabbed him and were glad to see him. Treated him well. Women squaws picked him up and carried him into a hut. Fed him and let him sleep. He was exhausted. Nate stayed on a couple of weeks –The Indians gave him a tomahawk to throw – but he couldn't do it. Indians teased him and laughed at his misses. When rested, Nate got restless and wanted to move on. He was afraid he'd be caught again. Indians wanted him to stay, but they gave him food and he went his way. Another night or two of sleep in the wilds Nate met up with Comanche Indians. They fed him well on deer meat and hard tortillas (ash cake) cooked on top the fire. After another two weeks or so, the Indians gave him knives when he decided to go on west. Nate claimed he was 20 years old then, tho it isn't definite. Took 3 months to reach Imperial Valley. Got a little work there and met up with other colored folks.

Drifted west to Rincon and married an Indian woman. Dr. Bailey of Palomar Mt. visited Nate regularly. Nate often visited with Max's grandmother all day – talking and laughing. Max remembers hearing them when he came in from milking the cows after his school day. Nate was baptized by Indians and he became a member of the tribe. Allowed to dance in their dance ceremonials. Tie red bandana around his forehead, and a feather stuck in. Attended Indian fiestas.

Nate made it a rule to walk away from trouble. Nate never knew a stranger. In 1901 and 1902 Max worked at Smith Hotel on Palomar. He barbecued meat for the hotel guests. … Nate sometimes helped but was always on hand to eat. He smoked a pipe. Liked liquor. Liked a good joke. Saw a pretty young girl – Nate said, "Let her come!" In his west end ranch he planted apricot trees, fig tree, apple tree. Smith gave Nate a bottle --- food and clothes. Nate had owl eyes – he could walk in the night without a light. …



Nathan Harrison, undated. PC91-1354, Frances Bevan Ryan Papers, Escondido Public Library

Clyde S. James

Frances Bevan Ryan interviewed Clyde Sherman James (1888-1973) on November 14, 1964, and made these notes [6]:

> Clyde's two brothers (both deceased) rented Doane Valley for awhile. In 1915 – Clyde came down off the Palomar Mountain on west end grade. Nate was an old fellow sitting at the watering trough. White hair and beard looked like cotton against his black face. Nate joked about himself. "Ise de fust white man on dis here mountain, but I'se stayed so long Ise turned black." … Nate was chore boy and companion to Grandpa James (at the Jensen ranch now) for awhile. Nate was a great spinner of yarns. Great sense of humor – well liked by all. When they parted Nate shook hands like a polished gentleman – He was glad to see folks.

Thekla James Young

Frances Bevan Ryan interviewed Thekla Artelia James Young (1899-1978) on December 7, 1964, and made these notes [6]:

> Colonel James (Thekla's father) leased Doane valley for cattle up to 1916. Also leased for two years from Nate. 160 acres land on Palomar west end. Nate couldn't read or write. Lease pay was 1 gallon whiskey and a sack of beans. Thekla first saw Nate in 1912, or 1913. She was helping drive cattle. Saw him at his little rock cabin. Nate had on three pair of overalls. White beard. Had two dogs. When people went up Palomar for vacation they took clothes and food to Nate. Nate was bout 5' 8-10" high but age stooped him. "I called him Nate to his face – but if I were talking to someone about him I'd say 'Nigger Nate.' That was his wish too – he called himself Nigger Nate. Wasn't bad! …

Nate Harrison, c1903 Myrtle Elizabeth Johnson photo, SDSU Library

Clarence Rand

Frances Bevan Ryan interviewed Clarence Rand (1883-1964) on October 17, 1964, and made these notes [6]:

> I was hunting deer on Palomar once. I was chasing a crippled deer by old Nate's cabin, on the west end. Was about all in. Nate gave me a drink of cold water from his spring. Tasted good. Revived me. Nate asked me to eat with him. Showed me his hut. He had killed a wild hog and was smoking the meat. Smoke and odor terrible. I decided I wasn't hungry.

Nathan Harrison, 1916 Escondido History Center

Fred Blum

Frances Bevan Ryan interviewed Caspar Fred Blum (1882-1976) on December 10 and 21, 1964, and made these notes [6]:

> Knew Nate from 1905-1915. Drove stage from San Diego to Smith Douglass Hotel summers 1905-06. … Two trips per week. – drove only during summers May-Oct. Leave San Diego 8am – changed horses at Poway and ate lunch – Change horses at Escondido – Overnight in Valley Center at Jack Maxey's Hotel … 8 hour trip to Escondido – 12 hours on up to Palomar. Nate was waiting on Billy Goat Point. Watching for stage on stage days. Leave San Diego every Monday; arrive Palomar Tuesdays; return to San Diego Wednesday. Second trip Thursday and Fridays; Return Saturday. Rest in San Diego Sundays.

Palomar stage, 1907 Robert Asher photo

> … Nate had a black and white dog named Bill Dukes. Entertained passengers with yarns (mostly tales of encounters with wild animals).
>
> One time a "bar" was chasing Nate. He climbed a tree and spend the night in a hollow log rather than chance outrunning the "bar."
>
> A wild cat went up a tree. Nate thought to poke him down with his cane stick so Bill Dukes could have the fun to kill him. The two rolled around. Seemed to Nate that Bill Dukes was helping the cat mor'n Nate

> Nate was skeered o' snakes. Telling the stories one snake came out as hundreds and hundreds o' snakes. "I jus got out of their way and never looked back!"
>
> Doane … finally advertised and married a gal from the southern states. She brought along her mother and a colored maid. When Doane stopped at Nate's he said, "Nate, I brought you a wife." Nate answered, "Which one?"
>
> Nae was crossing the swollen San Luis Rey river going to the flour mill. Nate swore the horse got dizzy and fell down. Nate had to be fished from the willow tree he was clinging on to. Nate was the one who was dizzy. Too much bottle!
>
> Nate liked his drink. Had a saying, "But the Preacher stole my demijohn."
>
> Blum hauled apples down Palomar in the fall. Would leave groceries enough for Nate to do through the winter. Louis Salmons, Mendenhalls and Frenchman saw that Nate had winter food. [PB: Frenchmen Augusti and Jean Nicolas owned land adjacent to Nathan Harrison.] He hibernated like a bear.
>
> Ask Nate what foods he liked – answered, "Jerkeys! Anything I'se like better is more jerkey."
>
> … Nate was a timber man and chimney builder. One trip down the mountain it was snowing and cold! Saw a wisp of smoke curling from Nate's cabin. Inside Nate and his dog sat almost inside the fire place shivering. Had a bath towel around his head and neck. Blum built him a big fire -- so they all got warmed.

Adalind S. Bailey

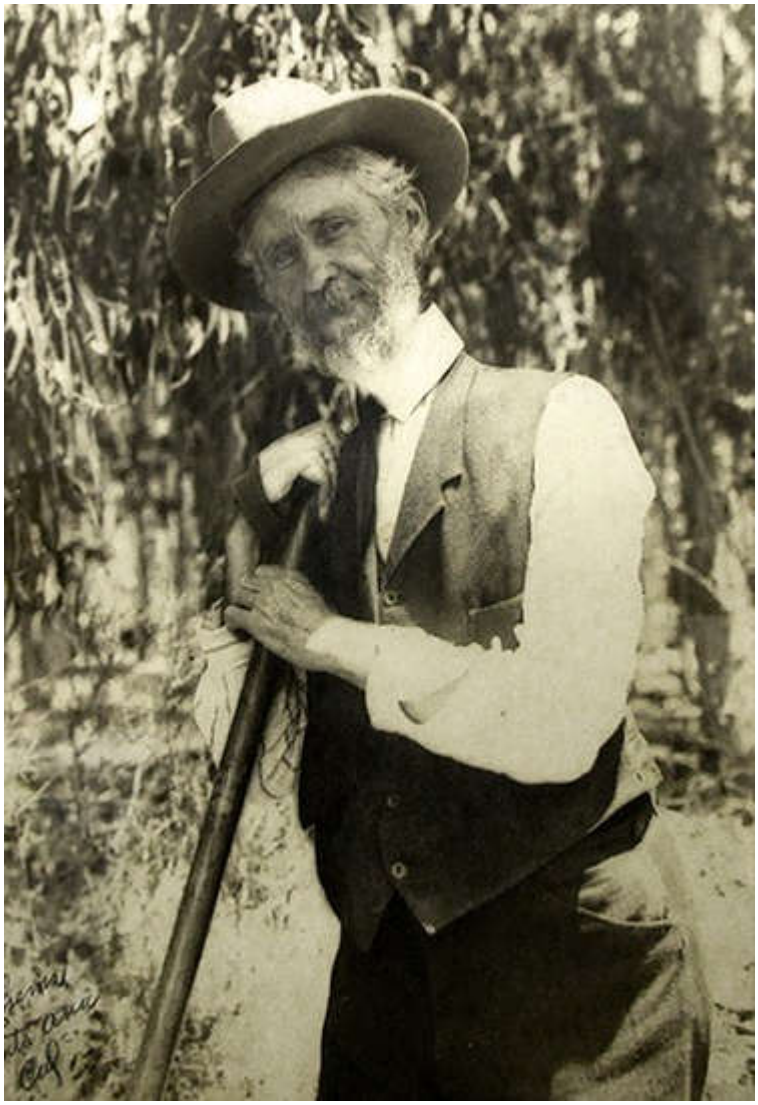
In an oral history of Adalind Bailey, it is recorded [11]:

> Nate Harrison was 'very dignified and very poised' and 'a nice old fellow.' Adalind Bailey would bring him a pan of corn bread, and Milton would bring him mutton. 'When the people butchered up here they always took something to him.'

Elizabeth Frazee Worsley

In an undated letter, Elizabeth Frazee Worsley (1889-1974) wrote Frances Bevan Ryan about Nathan Harrison and her father Isaac Jenkinson Frazee [6]:

> … Now in regard to old "Uncle Nate" – Nate Harrison. Yes, I <u>do</u> remember him and can supply you with some vivid recollections of him. In the first place, it was because of Uncle Nate that I had my <u>first</u> lesson in "Civil Rights" and tolerance. Because of the important place Civil Rights is having in the public mind at the present moment perhaps you might like to hear about my first lesson. It happened long ago when I was a young child. We were trudging up that <u>awful g</u>rade on the west side of Palomar. In those days it was a series of narrow crooked "switch backs" from the floor of the valley up to the timber-line. That particular summer was an extremely hot one and made worse by a scourge of grass hoppers that had eaten clean all the vegetation on the mountainside.



Isaac Jenkinson Frazee, 1927 Bowers Museum

Rather than follow the wagon the long way, we children would take short cuts from one switch back to another. As we clambered up over the rocks the grass hoppers would rise up like a cloud in our faces! To add to our misery we were all just about famished for a drink of water. We had heard tales of a black man on the mountain who gave drinks of cool Spring water to thirsty travelers so it was only natural for us to wonder how far it was to his place. I called out to my brother, "I hope we will get to that "nigger's" soon!" My father heard me – I knew that I had said something wrong but I didn't know what until we turned a bend in the road and father stopped the team to rest it. Then he called me to him and we sat down on the bank beside the road and he put his arm around me. Then he said, "Elizabeth, I hear you use a word a little way back there that I never want you to ever use again." I said, "What word was it, papa?" He said "nigger!" Then he went on to explain there was really no such word. The real word was "Negro." He explained about the "Races" also gave me a lecture about slavery. He told me that this "Mr. Nate Harrison" was a runaway slave; that he had settled high up on the mountain where he enjoyed his freedom; that he harmed no body but in fact, was kind and thoughtful because we would find him waiting on the roadside with a bucket of cool spring water for us to quench our thirst. At that moment he (and all his black brothers) became a person rather than a "nigger" to me! The lesson father taught me that day must have "sunk in" for I can truthfully say I have always been a champion for minority groups ever since! In

my classroom no child was ever discriminated against because of race or color. From that first meeting with him a friendship between him and my father grew up and lasted over the years. He loved father and father respected him.

As you probably know "Uncle Nate's" little shack sat well back from the road in a little canyon running down the mountain top. It was below regular timber-line. Never-the-less it was a bower of greenery. A little spring trickled out of the mountain-side nearby. Uncle Nate had cleaned it out and built a little rock apron in front of it. It was from this Spring he used to carry the buckets of water to greet the weary travelers with after he had seen their wagons toiling up the grade far below. There was no other water to be found until one got nearly to the top. … Over the years father had many long talks with him and on one of these he asked him where he wanted to be buried. He said, "Right up here on my mountain side and no place else." …

Once when father told him about his collection of autographs of famous men he said to Uncle Nate, "Mr. Harrison (father always called him that) I would like to have your autograph to add to my collection because I consider you to be a man who has scattered considerable good as you have gone through life." Uncle Nate was then an old old man with white hair that set off his mahogany brown skin and I remember the picture of dignity he made as he reached for the pencil and paper father held out to him. When he handed it back father was surprised to see an "X" – the only signature Uncle Nate knew how to write! He was small and stooped. One time after a chat with father, he drew himself up above the stick he was using for a cane and said, "Mr. Frazee, I don't know why but I always feel ten feet high after I talk to you!" I have always thought that was a lovely compliment to father.

As you probably know, he married in his old age. She was an Indian. Father had heard of the marriage so the next time he went up the mountain he stopped and congratulated Nate but the old man was sad. The marriage had not worked out and his wife had left him. He said "I won't talk about her but she put me back into chains just like (illegible) Harrison did when I was his slave." …

Robert Haley Asher

Robert Haley Asher (1868-1953) first visited Palomar Mountain in 1901, later settling there in 1903, and had considerable interactions with Nathan Harrison. In his *My Palomar* memoir, Asher writes about Harrison [6]:

One of Nate's view spots was "Billygoat Point" which was about a mile below Nate's well and some hundred feet south of the road. This point commanded an extensive view of the whole mountainside, stretching from Pauma Canyon on the northwest to Nate's own canyon to the southeast. I have seen him perched there for an hour or two at a time while he was waiting for me to get abreast of the point as I toiled up the grade afoot. I have often stopped at the well for lunch, always making a little fire to heat water for tea. Sometimes I made camp there for the night, and Nate would come out from his house, which was back a bit from the road, and chat with me for a half-hour or so. It was always a pleasure to meet him, and he seemed glad to see me.

One evening when I reached Nate's Well, on the way up from Escondido, everything was damp from a thick mist which had begun about the time I was passing Billygoat Point. I

had found a dry place for my blankets and was trying to start a fire when Uncle Nate hove in sight. He watched me for a moment and then said:

"Having trouble getting the fire started?"

Robert Haley Asher, undated

"Yes," I answered, "everything is so damp."

"And you don't know how to start a fire when things are wet?"

"That's right," I said.

"Well, you see those white sage bushes over there with some dead flower stalks sticking up? You get some of those and you can start your fire easy."

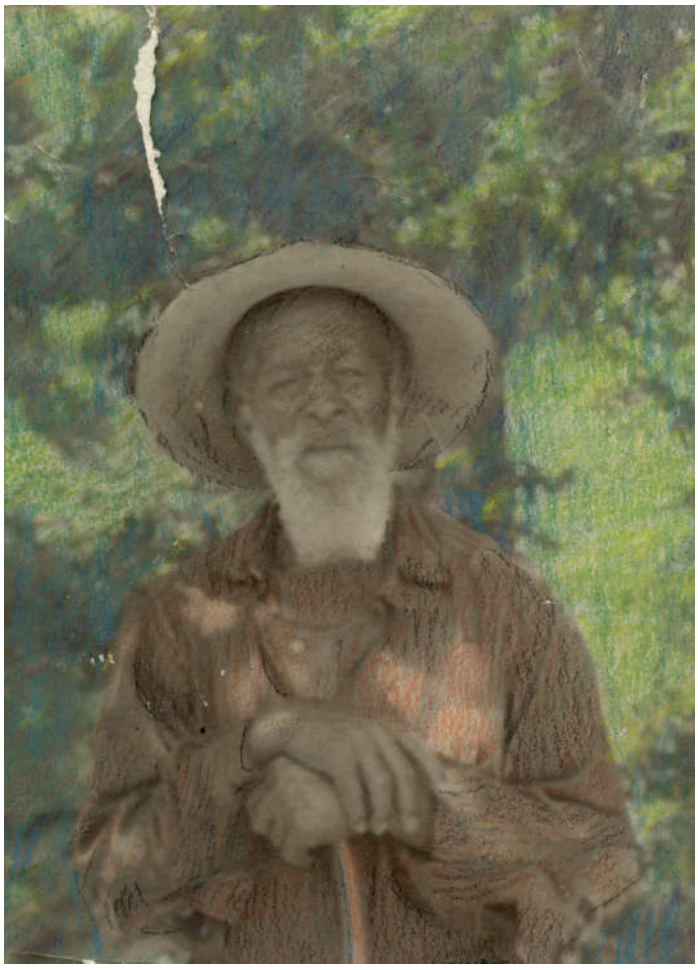
That was good news, so I stood up and took a step or two toward the sage bush when Nate spoke again:

"Not now, you can try it some other time. Better come into the house where it is dry."

"Thank you," I said, "but I don't want to impose on you."

"You won't be a bit of trouble. You can make your tea on my fire, and I have an extra bed. You can spread out your blankets on top of mine."

Nate did not talk much that evening. I apologized for being so tired and sleepy so soon after supper and he told me that I had better unroll my blankets and go to bed. In the morning, I was off at daylight, not waiting for breakfast.



Robert Asher's hand colored photo of Nathan Harrison, undated

Once again I was Nate's guest overnight. It had been raining heavily a few hours before I reached Nate's well on the upgrade and was threatening to rain again at any moment. I had not intended stopping, but Nate was there and he insisted that I be his guest overnight. He said he would like to have me eat with him; he had plenty for us both.

Arrived in the house, he told me to unroll my blankets and take it easy while he was getting supper. And such a supper! Beef stew, with the beef done just right. Flaky white potatoes with gravy that couldn't be beat. And perfect home-baked bread. The loaves were very thick but thoroughly baked all the way through with a rich, brown crust. After supper Nate coaxed me into his easy chair beside the fire, and, after putting away the supper dishes, seated himself on a stool near-by and commenced telling stories of his experiences on and around the mountain. After awhile he suggested I might be more comfortable lying down. So I went back to the bed while he continued sitting on the stool.

> It had commenced to rain by this time, and with the drip from the roof outside the window, together with the roar of the wind in the treetops overhead, and the monotonous sound of Nate's quiet voice, well, I nearly went to sleep on him several times. Each time as I was about to doze off, he would bring me back with a "Maybe you are tired of listening?" Of course I always answered in the negative. His language was such as I had been accustomed to all my life, and I was reminded of many evenings in the Asher home in San Diego where I had lived as a boy. Father Asher used to talk us kids to sleep with stories of pioneer days in Kentucky. …

In a January 1951diary entry, Robert Asher writes about newspaper reporter Edmund Rucker visiting him at his sister's home in El Cajon and borrowing Asher's type-written story about Nate Harrison; Asher's story is quoted in the newspaper and deviates from above as follows [12]:

> It had been raining heavily for hours before I reached Nate's Well on the upgrade. I had not intended stopping, but Nate was there and he insisted that I stay overnight. In the house he prepared supper and it was magnificent! Beef stew with the beef done just right; flaky white potatoes with gravy that couldn't be beat. And perfect home-cooked bread, with rich, brown crust, and without a hint of the sourness so common in those days in white folks' kitchens. After supper Nate coaxed me into an easy chair by the fire, seated himself on a stool opposite and talked of his experiences on the mountain. It was cozy inside, but it was a stormy night on Palomar. Nate's language was that of a cultivated man, but he used many striking idioms.

In his *My Palomar* memoir, Asher writes [6]:

One morning, while I was still living at "The Dugout," I started out bright and early with some scratch paper in my pocket and the strap of my camera over my shoulder, bound for a very special interview with Mr. Nathan Harrison. Nate was standing near the well and had a little dog with him. But the dog ran off quite a distance when I hove in sight, and, although Nate coaxed and coaxed, doggie just wouldn't come all the way back. So I took a picture of them as they were, with the pup some distance behind Nate.

Then Nate and I sat down on a convenient bank beside the road all set for the impending interview. He had arranged for the interview some time before, and there is a suspicion in the back of my mind that Nate had not only brushed up his memory, but also his apparel and put on dilapidated overalls and all. He had probably dug up the most ragged pair of overalls he could find in the scrap heap.

"When I first came to the mountain," said Nate, "bear were thick. You could just hear them poppin' their teeth.

"French Valley was a bad place for lions. Once there were thirty-five or forty head of Dyche's horses there, led by old Capanelle bell horse, and six mules. One moonlight night the lions got after the horses, and if it hadn't been for the mules some of the horses might have been killed. Mules go at lions both ends to. I was doctoring the horses for a month. None of the horses died."

"I met a bear near where Bailey's barn is now. I was riding the pinto horse. The bear was coming up the trail and looked at us good. Then he went down the trail. I was glad he went."

"We got two bear in French Valley. Andy Blethen was with me. I got one in a trap above the barn in Doane Valley. He nearly got away. Had chewed the logs nearly to pieces. At the mill was a great place for bear. You could go almost any time in morning or evening, and see them walking through the valley. I could show old bear beds back of the cabin yet. They lie down just like a dog."

"When I came to the country, no Indian was allowed to speak to the priest without taking off his hat. Mexicans about the same. The Indians were treated like slaves. The Indians were gathered in front of the missions. They were given rations like soldiers; so many beeves to each bunch, so much beans, et cetera, every Saturday or Sunday."

"About ten years ago when Father Williams came, the Indians thought he was Christ, even though he told them that he, Father Williams, was just like them, only he had education."

"A fellow from San Francisco came here from Julian hunting a railroad. He wanted a place to sleep. Scott had fed him and had given him a paper of crackers. He had one extra coat, and that was all he had to sleep on. I gave him two blankets. He snored like sixty. In the morning, I told him I would show him how to find a railroad and I gave him some coffee. I sent him to Pala. He was well educated. He said, 'do you believe in dreams?' I said no. He had dreamed of a fortune coming from the ground. He had letters and papers. I was glad to get shed of him. I didn't want that sort of a fellow around. Didn't want my throat cut."

"Lions jump from thirty to thirty-five feet, tail and body straight out on the level as they jump. I got one on the ridge east of my cabin. He was 14 feet 7 inches from tip to tip."

"I made rounds of several camps of Indians, sheepherders for the Frenchman, baking bread. A lion went through a flock killing the sheep, but with a dog biting his rear. Then the dog treed the lion. An Indian saw a tail. He got to the upper side and shot the whole side of the lion's head off. But the lion still lived. It was alive the next morning. I shot him then. That fixed him. The boss gave the Indian ten dollars, and he got six dollars more for the skin. He gave the scalp to me, and I got five dollars for it at the Court House in San Diego. With a good dog, you can get lions below the falls at the fork of Lion Creek. I have seen them as close as thirty feet; but they are cowardly."

"A day or two ago, I counted fifty ground squirrels near the pump. One day I put out poison for squirrels. The Indian boy picked up seventy-five the first day. He missed one squirrel. A rattlesnake got the squirrel. The snake died. A skunk got the snake. The skunk died."

"I have never found a wildcat poisoned. You can get lions that way, though. But you must never touch the bait with your hands. You kill a sheep. Take a knife. Jab the sheep full of holes. Then drop poison in the holes."

"I had hounds. I killed twenty-seven cats in one month. The skins are in Sparkman's robe. I got tired of counting fox skins. I took a whole load of skins to Sparkman's, but he couldn't sell any." [PB: Philip Stedman Sparkman's store in Rincon]

"Striplin's boy saw a cat. He ran at it and hollered. The cat ran up a tree. The boy stayed with it until the stage came along. Harold Smith shot it." [PB: Samuel Striplin of Valley Center ran the sawmill in Pedley Valley]

"The surveyors of the Meridian (San Bernardino Meridian) were McIntosh, Hancock, and Wheeler. About twenty-five or thirty years ago, sixteen government surveyors came through on the Meridian. It was winter with snow on the ground, but they paid no attention to the weather. Below Oliver's on the line between nine and ten South, there is a cluster of white oaks. They are cut and marked, 'Section Corner.' (Concerning survey of Township 9 South, Range 1 East.)"

"The Frenchman put up fifteen-hundred dollars for the survey, Doane and Mendenhall wouldn't dig up. Charlie Fox was the surveyor and I was cook."

"I helped build thirty-two miles of two-wire fence on Pine Mountain. Mr. McCoy had the contract. He lost a hundred dollars on the job."

"I told Todd about rattlesnakes below Oliver's. Todd's son went down the next day and killed six. Todd went down the next day after that and killed seven. There is a den there."

"Three boys came up the mountain, shooting at everything. Mr. Doane and Mr. Gage had just been up to the mail box and had started for home. Doane heard the shooting and came back and caught the boys in the act. They were shooting holes in the mail box. One shot had gone through a letter of Gage's. Doane pretended that he was real mad. He said: 'Now, you boys pay five dollars, or I'll take you to San Diego.'" (Note: the penciled notes came to an abrupt end right here, but it is my recollection that Nate said Doane threw a good scare into the boys and let them go on a promise to do no more shooting while on the mountain.)

Winbert Fink

Winbert Fink (1868-1953) arrived on Palomar Mountain in 1895, settling in Will Valley on the east side of Palomar Mountain [14]. Fink writes about Harrison [13]:

HARRISON, NATHAN

Nigger Nate by Frink

Nathan Harrison, Nigger Nate a well known character to all the old time settlers on Smith mountain and as he often said he was the first white man to live on Smith mountain and his coming was like this: at the time when the sheep men used the high pasture lands on the mountain for summer and Fall feed and kept them ~~then~~ there if the snow held off till the pasture was good in low land and coast. Nigger Nate, two dogs and a flock of sheep came to those vallies afterward known as French valley and Doane valley. There is where Nate was ~~sheafherding~~ shepherding the sheep when he grew tired of being alone with only dogs and sheep for company. I told those dogs to take good care of the sheep he afterwards said and left for Pauma Rancheria, taking his roll of bedding and the little food, flour and frijollies which would insure him a welcome with the Indians. His living with the Indians ~~x~~ became so interesting he did not return to the sheep for some time and when he did found dogs and sheep gone and over pasture and range some dead sheep and if any sheep were spared they had left the range for good and mountain lions after them. His job was gone as well as the sheep and he was responsible for the flock of sheep. Responsibility sat very lightly on his shoulders but what would happen when the owner came

Nigger Nate

with supplies and get the flock of sheep. He thought of safty for his hide and that safty lay in flight from the scene of the disaster till after the owner came with grub and found out what had happened to his sheep and hunted among the Rancherias of the Indians for the defaulting Nate and was met with the usual response. No savvy did he return home to the home Ranch at Chino. Nate returned to Rancheria at Pauma and ever afterward remained in the County. He claimed to be the first white man to live on Smith mountain meaning he was no Indian, tho' he was black as the ace of spades and one time he was asked if the Winery man would mistake him for an Indian he replyed "not 'less I fades considerable". Many times he turned up at Agua Tebia Rancho asking for work but meaning food and comfortable home and never was refused to be taken in and supplyed with clothes and when the work became distasteful to him left without notice to live among the Indians and later would return as glad as a lost pup to its mother. This amused Maj. Utt very much and was a pleasure to hear him tell his adventures with the squaws who had not been able to quell the manly spirit of Nate. He was persuaded to take a Free Homestead on

the West end of Smith mountain, 60 acres next to the Pauma Grant line on oat ridge where was a Spring and pasture land and which he owned at the time of his death. The County made a single track road up the mountain thru his land and put a water trough at his place where travelers could stop and camp and at this place is where the public came to know him. Get his stomach filled with food and drink he would reveal the local history and traditions of all that he had come in contact: as much of it was first hand knowledge was amusing and interesting. As he and his master were 49'ers at which time he was a grown man and claimed to be the best man among his masters Slaves but never told how many slaves his master owned or if he was the only one. At the time the Lincoln pennies were minted I gave him a bright penny and told him what Lincoln done for the slaves. he said "I know about Abe Lincoln. I had my freedom long for that." we knew that for it was a subject he would not talk about. He had escaped from his master in the gold diggins and found refuge in the South part of the state among strangers and at one time a wood cutter at San Gabriel Mission

nd saw some adventurous times there and El Monte by the night robbers. He had no education, wrote his name with an X, voted the Republican party; his memory retained everything exact as our books do the account: he repeated the tales in the exact words he used before. Much of his food came from travelers on the road and should he receive a ₤ gift of money would round up a horse and with a jug in a sack put off to the winery and most often it would be empty when he returned by reson he had stopped with the Indians on his way home. He spent much of his time in his old age sitting on a boulder at Billy goat point where he could see the road for miles below and know when anyone was coming that way.

There came a time when he remained in the cabin and we saw him no more and a time when the County car took him to the hospital and then the cemetery and we knew him no more. Many storys and tales about him are remembered by the few old-timers still living and who have erected a monument for him at his old place on the County road.

Original plaque on Nate Harrison memorial Palomar Mountain State Park photo

Nate Harrison Memorial, undated. Theodore Bailey at right San Diego History Center

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